

The Long-Lasting Influence of Ideological Prejudices:

The Case of Ye Lingfeng (1905-1975), a Misunderstood Writer and Intellectual in Modern China

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Through the works and some biographical issues of Ye Lingfeng (1905-1975), one of the writers of the so-called Shanghai School (*haipai*, 海派), this paper aims to offer some hints of the multi-folded bunch of prejudices which the history of modern Chinese literature is intertwined with.

To reach this goal, the following issues will be taken into consideration:

1. an analysis of Ye Lingfeng's early production, before his moving from mainland China to Hongkong – with particular reference to *The Dream of a Virgin Chunüde meng*, (处女的梦, *Chunüde meng*), in comparison with Ding Ling (丁玲) *Miss Sophia's Diary* (*Shafei nüshi de rij*, 莎菲女士的日记); to which a much bigger success arose;
2. a general description of the complicated issues which led inflicting on him the very unfair label of being a “traitor”, moving from his clash with Lu Xun in the late The twenties and early Thirties to his “collaboration” with the Nationalist Party during the first period of his staying in Hong Kong;
3. an overview of his literary works in order to highlight his way to connect traditional and modern literary tradition, which – if prejudices were not working - could provide some suggestions to the core issue of the relationship between “classic” (feudal?) literature and the literature of New China.

Mi piace immaginare che se fossimo un laboratorio dove si agucchiano ricami e si intrecciano pizzi dedicheremmo un lavoro di aghi, fili, spolette e colori a una collega che chiude il suo percorso professionale insieme a noi. Ma, per dirla con Lu Xun, siamo “tessitori di parole”: questo è il solo lavoro che – spero- sappiamo fare e questo abbiamo messo insieme, dedicando a Pinuccia un poco del tempo della nostra ricerca. Ho scelto di scrivere in inglese perché è l'inglese, oramai, la lingua franca della comunità scientifica e perché, in onore di Pinuccia, ho cercato di fare del mio meglio affinché il mio saggio non fosse un esercizio di circostanza ma potesse avere qualche utilità all'interno dell'ambito scientifico in cui lavoro. Mi sono però voluta tenere uno spazio iniziale “privato”, nella mia lingua madre, lo spazio dedicato a una amica con cui condivido anche la lingua di nascita. L'ombrello oramai frusto delle “discipline orientali”, che continuiamo a utilizzare per comodità, per pigrizia, forse persino per affezione, ma che non ha oramai alcun significato, ha tuttavia fatto in modo che Pinuccia ed io lavorassimo per moltissimi anni fianco a fianco, pur occupandoci di mondi molto diversi. Non abbiamo quindi condiviso il lavoro di ricerca, ma abbiamo per molti anni condiviso il lavoro burocratico, la attività di progettazione e di programmazione dello sviluppo delle nostre discipline, insomma una parte forse

meno nobile ma altrettanto necessaria del nostro lavoro. E io sarò sempre grata a Pinuccia, perché ha reso queste incombenze meno faticose di quanto troppo spesso non siano e... mi ha addolcito la vita. E non solo perché ha sempre avuto nel cassetto della sua scrivania un tesoretto di cioccolatini, zenzeri canditi e caramelle da condividere con noi, ma perché non ha mai tradito la mia certezza che – anche nella rara eventualità in cui non fossimo d'accordo – mi trovavo di fronte a una persona PER BENE, che accompagnava il proprio non comune spirito di servizio alla capacità di dipanare le matasse ingarbugliate dell'accademia con la mano paziente della moralità e del buon senso. Mi mancherà, ma la immaginerò contenta nella sua casa immersa nella natura che tanto ama, e questo continuerà ad addolcirmi le giornate. Grazie Pinu.

1. Introduction

Ye Lingfeng (1905-1975) is up to now one a rather neglected author of *haipai* (海派) - the “Shanghai school” of writers booming from the Twenties to the early Forties – in spite of the “*haipai* fever” which arose both in China and abroad from the end of the Nineties of the last century. Ye Lingfeng left China, moving to Guangzhou and then to Hong Kong, in the late Thirties (1938-1939), but this does not explain the oblivion he has been relegated; many other authors, who later enjoyed great attention, also fled to Hong Kong in those days or later. Leo Ou’fan Lee, who devoted to Ye a limited but as usual very inspiring and well documented pages, considers him as a writer of “limited technique”, who “compensated for the weakness of his fictional technique with his pointed evocations of the sites and sounds of the city based on his own familiarity – as if he, too, were playing urban dandy and *flâneur* via his fiction” (Lee 1999: 263).

My paper will not focus on the evaluation of Ye Lingfeng literary production in spite of the fact I think that Leo Ou’fan Lee evaluation is ungenerous and that Ye Lingfeng literary production deserves to be reconsidered; in this paper, anyway, I will rather try to undergo the reasons why, in spite of the prominent role Ye Lingfeng had among the Chinese intellectuals in Hong Kong till his death in 1975 and also hereafter, and notwithstanding the reputation he had enjoyed both in mainland China and Hong Kong in the first decades of the last century, he is almost totally ignored by readership in mainland China, contrary to what happened to many other authors of the Shanghai school. Among them, the most noticeable are Zhang Ailing (张爱玲, 1920-1995) and Mu Shiying (穆时英, 1912-1940). The former enjoyed a sort of “Zhang Ailing fever” in the twenty years between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, with the success of the movie *Lust Caution*¹, by Ang Lee, which

¹ The movie is taken from the short story *Se jie* (色戒 Abstain from sex), written in 1950.

won the Golden Lion in Venice in 2007 contributing to spread her fame; the latter is far less famous but anyway has become part of the overall picture of the “Old Shanghai” which contributed to the glamorous image of the city sold within the country and abroad in silent juxtaposition with the “back to the motherland” Hong Kong (1997) but also with the “after-Tian’anmen incident” Beijing (1989).

As we know, in China, the “reevaluation” of a writer cannot be detached by the political context: Mu Shiyong died very young and was probably killed by a Guomindang agent, so that his dramatic death fed the never proved rumours that he was a two-faced secret agent; this biographic element, together with some features within his novels, which somehow show his concern about social inequality, helps to understand his victory against the political prejudice which for a long while labelled the “Shanghai-school” as “decadent” (*tuipei*, 颓废).

As for Zhang Ailing the reasons of her fortune would deserve some more analysis, and in my opinion it is connected with a sort of “invention” of Zhang Ailing as a “romantic character”, fitting with the simultaneous invention of the “Shanghai myth” which was carried out within the last years of the 20th century. Of course, I am not taking into any consideration the literary value of Zhang Ailing's works, as I am moving from the assumption that the “literary value” is often not enough for promoting a writer in China. In the case of Zhang Ailing, by the way, the biographical element of her (short-lasting) marriage with Hu Lancheng (胡兰成, 1906-1981), which seems to have ended because of his reiterative adultery, could be enough to keep her in the realm of the writers who deserve to be forgotten. Hu was a Vice Minister of the Ministry of Propaganda in the Japanese-supported government in Nanjing, which was created after the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937 and was led by Wang Jingwei (汪精卫, 1883-1944), whom the current narratives regard as a traitor of his motherland. In spite of this “black mark” on her reputation, and although she left China to Hong Kong and then to the United States, she has been regarded with much less suspicion than Ye Lingfeng, to whom the Chinese critics have been quite severe if not unfear.

2. Was Ye Lingfeng a “decadent” writer? Sha Fei vs. Sha Mei

Why Ye Lingfeng has been often simply brushed off as a “decadent writer”² if not a traitor for a long while after his death in 1975? Does he “deserve” these labels?

² See the speech Lu Xun (鲁迅) gave to the Research Association for Social Sciences (Shehui kexue yanjiuhui, 社会科学研究会), on August 20th, 1928: “Art and Literature in Shanghai: a Glimpse”, (“Shanghai wenyizhi yi pie, 上海文艺之一瞥”), in Lu Xun (1973, vol. 4: 279), where he referred to Ye Lingfeng as a “decadent” painter belonging to a new generation of “hooligans” (*xin de liumang huajia*, 新的流氓画家). Ye Lingfeng moved to Shanghai from his birthplace, Nanjing, at the

I will try to answer these questions taking into account two different issues:

a) the major mismatch between some of his works and some similar production by other Authors, with particular reference to Ding Ling's (丁玲) *Miss Sophia's Diary* (*Shafei nüshi de rij*, 莎菲女士的日记), which I will compare with Ye's *The Dreams of a Virgin* (处女的梦, *Chunü de meng*, 1928);

b) the role played by some biographic elements, with special regard to Ye's clash with Lu Xun in the last years of Ye's staying in China (end of the Twenties and beginning of the Thirties) and his alleged close relationship with Japanese government in the early Forties, during the Japanese occupation of the British Protectorate.

I am cagily suggesting in my paper that if a sort a long-lasting prejudice against Ye Lingfeng were not working, his literary production would have been somehow even useful in helping the so-called new literature to build up new and original ties with the literature of the past, which was a major issue for the Chinese intellectuals in those days, no matter which political battlefield they were belonging to.

It is to be pointed out that the label of “decadent writer” is at present questioned or overcome by several scholars in mainland China, some of them openly arguing about the morality of his works. But, at the same time, a sort of over-cautious attitude is not infrequent also among those who apprise Ye Lingfeng's literary works. In 2011, when the Shanghai school had since quite a while already gained its place within the Chinese literature of the first decades of the 20th century, Wang Airong writes an interesting article³ underling the importance of the psychological analysis of the characters in Ye Lingfeng's works and the writer's mindful approach to Freud's theories, but, at the same time, at the end of the paper the scholar points out that:

The creative works of Ye Lingfeng do use multiple and not uniform patterns: he makes use of the "montage" (蒙太奇) techniques and puts a lot of attention on time and space dislocation. *In spite of the fact that we cannot ignore the negative aspects of his "ideological system as a whole" , and we should not be seduced by his tendency in concentrating on the dual*

beginning of the Twenties. We know that he enrolled in the Shanghai Professional Institute of Arts at (上海美术专科学校, Shanghai Meishu zhuanke xueyuan) at the beginning of the Twenties, he basically learned Western art, but he never graduated; at the age of 19, he was already active as an editor and young write in the Weekly Journal of the Creation Society (创造周报, Chuangzao zhoubao).

³ See Wang (2011: 61). In the same year, an article by Gu (2011) published in a periodical under the control of the Ministry of Education was still sticking to the idea that Ye Lingfeng writings are basically superficial, narrow-minded and even “vulgar in descriptions” (Wang 2011: 103), with an evaluation much less generous than Li Yeping (李夜平), who early in 1990 was already labelling Ye Lingfeng literature as “romantic scripts in an ivory tower” but was anyway acknowledging its literary value (Li 1990), and even its importance as a “manifesto” to promote “the right of loving” versus old moral principles.

nature of his characters and their sexual and material desires, thereby making his works losing any positive social meaning and aesthetical value, nevertheless, if we take as unquestionable the sole point that “literature is for the sake of understanding human beings” and consider psychoanalysis as a tool which art can use for digging out a person's inner world, for portraying the multi-dimensional subconscious features of human beings and as a sort of preferred medium to enrich the expressive means of the realism, we have then to admit that psychoanalysis has provided both a brand new esthetical train of thought and new artistic concepts and we have to confer Ye Lingfeng the status of master of psychological analysis in the history of literature.”

To question this label, I would take into consideration one of the most representative among Ye Lingfeng short stories, *The Dreams of a Virgin* (*Chunüde meng*, 处女的梦), which he accomplished in November 1928, and compare it with Ding Ling (丁玲) *Miss Sophia's Diary* (*Shafei nüshi de rij*, 莎菲女士的日记), a well-known short story published for the first time in February 1928, some months earlier than Ye Lingfeng one's, on the monthly journal *The Short Story Magazine* (小说月报, *Xiaoshuo yuebao*), which achieved a resounding success and whose main character, Sophia, “has remained an icon in modern Chinese literature” (Wong 2014: 116). The reputation of Ding Ling character (and story) relies on the fact that critics regard the *Diary* as “boldly expos[ing] the psyche of a modern Chinese woman who is tormented by her erotic desires...”; for this very reason the *Diary* is considered as a milestone of the female literature in China: ‘the fact that the story is an internal monologue by and about a young woman, written by a female author, is often applauded as the emergence of “Chinese feminism” (Wong 2014: 116)⁴.

Besides the time of publication, Ye Lingfeng story has a lot of points in common with Ding Ling's one: the main character in both stories is an eighteen years old girl who spends most of the time in her bedroom (if not lying on their beds), Shafei/Sophia living in Beijing and Ye Lingfeng's character living in Shanghai. Ding Ling's character's name Shafei (莎菲), is usually understood as a personal name coming from the West, a sort of *wailaici* (外来词) but it could be read as Sha (莎), family name and Fei (菲), a personal name. The name of the main character in Ye Lingfeng's novel is Sha Mei (莎璠), and Sha here works as a family name; however, the two characters' names are quite similar. Ding Ling's Shafei is in poor health, Sha Mei is not, but the two girls seem to enjoy a sort of “seclusion”

⁴ This article, while focusing on the “colonial fantasy embodied by Ling Jishi, 凌吉士, the young handsome man from Singapore and offering a new and interesting perspective to read the story, also gives a general overview of the most qualified literature on the “feminist” interpretation of Ding Ling's story.

which allows them feeding their *reverie*⁵ and which confers to both the stories a sort of claustrophobic atmosphere; they both communicate a lot by letters, both have a sort of “secret lover” they dream about, and both are facing the turmoil arising from a sexual desire they are not able to cope with. Both the stories are told using the first person, Shafei is a “writer” in the sense that she makes use of a diary to describe her life and the diary itself constitutes the novel; *The Dreams of a Virgin* is not a diary, but Sha Mei seems to have the ambition to become a writer and this element is crucial to understand her fascination for Mr. Tanhua (昙华君), a young writer of some success to whom she addresses her letters and sends one of her works. Interestingly enough, anyway, the first chapter’s title of *The dreams...* is “Diary of Sha Mei” and the title of the last one is: “Diary of Tan Huajun”. The core of Ding Ling’s story is a quest for love which is not but the childish pursuit of a sexual experience which she thinks will drive her to the world of the grown-up people. The quest for love is also the as “core business” in Ye Lingfeng’s story, but Sha Mei childish attitude takes the shape of a radical rejection of sex as something which will force her to relinquish her “world of dreams”⁶. On her way to the bookshop, in the hope of meeting her beloved hero, she reacts with a sort a revulsion to the (ambiguous) reading suggestion from a peddler:

A shabby-looking peddler asked me in a whisper if I wanted to buy a recently published “History of sexuality”. I stared at him and he left without saying anything more. I happened to read some books on this the topic in the past, but I cannot find any interest in this kind of reading. I do not understand why some of my previous schoolmates were plunged in these readings round the clock. One of them, who had a big mouth, was mocking me saying that as I do not have any experience, I cannot understand this kind of literature. Is it true? I hope never undergo this experience, I hope to let my heart soaking in love forever. I hope it will be never invaded and harassed by the demon of sex.

(一个衣服褴褛 1 小贩低问我可要买一本新出的性史⁷。.....我红着脸向他瞪了一眼，他才一声不响的走开。以前的性史我是看过的，但我对于这类的书感不到很大的兴趣。我始终不明白以前的几个同学为什么那样昼夜不离的喜爱这类的书。一个刁嘴的同学笑我第一层爱的经验还没有经过，当然不会了解这类的书。真的么？我但愿我永远不要有这样的经验！我但愿我的心永远浸在爱的领域里。永远不要让性的恶魔魔来侵扰) (Ye 1997: 41).

⁵ The term “dream”, 梦, meng, appears in the title of Ye Lingfeng’s story, in the title of some of its chapters, and quite frequently within the text.

⁶ On this “swinging between dream and reality” see Xiao (2005).

⁷ (Of course, a "pest" cannot but being ragged and shabby!)

Her Prince Charming was perfectly fitting with the ideal image of men which was common among the young girls of the newly-born Shanghai bourgeoisie at least partially influenced by Western patterns:

My ideal man should have a gentle temper and a healthy, strong build; he should have an iron fist and a velvet heart...

(我理想中的男性，是要有温柔的性情，健强的体格，有男性的手腕而具女性心肠。)
(Ye 1997: 35).

At the same time he should also be good in appeasing her (and eventually her parents'!) concerns and fears for the future in those troubled days⁸:

I do not like politicians or scientists, to get married with these sort of people would not bring any happiness to a woman

(我不喜欢政治家和科学家，和这些人结合都不是女性的幸福。)(Ye 1997: 35).

The description of Sophia's "object of desire" is not very different:

How can I describe the charm of this man? Of course, his tall stature, his delicate white face, his soft hear are enough to dazzle anyone, but he moreover has an elegance which you cannot describe nor grasp, but which burns your heart away.

他，这生人，我将怎样去形容他的美呢？固然，他的颇长的身躯，白嫩的面庞，薄薄的小嘴唇，柔软的头，都足以闪耀人的眼睛，但他还另外有一种说不出，捉不到的丰仪来煽动你的心⁹

As Ka F. Wong points out, he has an "exotic" allure, being a Singaporean Chinese. The fascination for "exotic" is there also in Ye Lingfeng story, but in a wittier way: Sha Mei likes the youngsters who wear Western suits which seem to be a must-have for *à la mode* young men in Shanghai, even if she tells us that her father often alerts her by saying that those "bandits" causing riots and troubles on the streets will never snatch young people in Western suits: penny-less and boring people, who for the most part possess nothing else but the Western suit they wear on (父亲曾说拦路的强盗向来是不劫西装青年的，因为西装青年除了一身衣服之外大多是不再有，常常是穷而无聊，*Fuqin ceng shuo lanlude qiangdao xianglai shi bu jie xizhuang qingniande, yinwei xizhuang qingnian chule yishen yifu*

⁸ This additional remark is actually not crucial in the general economy of Ye Lingfeng's description and in my opinion mirrors the difficulty of Ye Lingfeng himself to directly being "politically engaged", as we will see later.

⁹ <https://www.kanunu8.com/book3/8372/186097.html> (February 20th, 2019)

zhiwai daduo shi bu zai you qian, changchang shi qiong erqie wuliao). Ye Lingfeng, who is himself deeply interested in Western culture and art and seems to enjoy looking like a *dandy*, is anyway aware that “Western-ized” young men are not always welcome by young ladies’ fathers and are much less well-off than they pretend to be. He confers then to Sha Mei a sort of consciousness that appearances can be deceptive. On the contrary, Sophie does not show any critical attitude when looking at Ling Jishi. Both the male characters have features which are good to feed the two girls’ romantic dream, no matter if it has or not direct sexual implications; this reverie anyway helps Sha Mei and “Sha Fei” to remain detached from reality, which Sha Mei fear, as it breaks dreams, and which Sha Fei – with some compliance – does not dear to long for, as she is suffering from tuberculosis.

SHA MEI:

It's true, I do not have any direct experience. I know from books and other people... As a matter of fact "actualizing" is the most ruthless word. As far as you "actualize", as far you take this turning, all your beautiful dreams will disappear.

(我自己是一点没有经验的，仅是从旁人的口口中和书上才知道,实现实在是最残酷的一个名辞。一踏上实在的路，什么美好的梦儿都要消灭).

....

(什么是爱，什么是男性，这些都与结婚和性爱一样都是我不知道而且也不愿知道的问题) (Ye 1997: 38).

SHA FEI:

Day and night I am constantly dreaming of things that would enable me not to have regrets when dying. I imagine myself lying on a bed in a sumptuous room....

无论在白天，在夜晚，我都在梦想可以使我没有遗憾在我死的时候的一些事情。我想能睡在一间极精致的卧房的睡榻上。。。

On the basis of these remarks on the two short stories, which have a lot in common, I cannot but be at least partially puzzled by the general understanding of the Sophie character as a sort of icon on the way of women’s liberation, while Sha Mei has been forgotten. Ding Ling is a female writer, while Ye Lingfeng is not, and her courage in writing about female sexual turmoil is somehow remarkable for those days, but if we look at the characters of the two stories Sha Fei/ Sophie is by no means more “progressive” than Sha Mei and her way to openly talk about “sex” and about her own physical desire does not bring along any gender consciousness. If compared with Sophie, Sha Mai is much more farseeing and more aware of the tricky implications the “Western” model of women liberation brings along; she is fascinated by those fashionable young men, but she keeps at a safe distance:

Ah, ah, penny-less and boring, you're simply demons disguising yourselves in a Western suit, who simply take us as everyday tools to kill time!

(啊啊，穷而无聊你们竟拿我们来作每天消磨时间的工具了，好一个西装里面的灵魂！)

At the same time she can question her father's opinions:

But not all the young men who wear western suits are poor and boring, you cannot tar everybody with the same brush.

(着西装的青年男性也未必人人都是穷而无聊，我也不能一笔抹杀) (Ye 1997: 42).

And, moreover, she shows some "gender consciousness" when revolting against those bothering her on her way home:

These slick and lecherous youngsters are quite annoying! I hope there will be one day when women can also be brave enough to walk after you the same way and make you experience how it tastes.

(这些浮滑的青年真讨嫌！但愿有一天女性也会大胆的跟在你们的后面，让你们来尝尝这个中的滋味) (Ye 1997: 42).

My point is of course not that, in order to build up a sort of new women's "prototype," Ye Lingfeng's Sha Mei should have chosen rather than Ding Ling's Sha Fei /Sophie but I think that a sort of "positive" prejudice towards the female writer was working while choosing Ding Ling's character – in spite of the sharp criticism Ding Ling also faced at the very beginning of the Forties and in some other moments of her long career-. On the contrary, Ye Lingfeng character was never taken into consideration as a strong "negative" prejudice was constantly working while evaluating Ye Lingfeng overall production and career.

3. Attacking Lu Xun: a clash with long-lasting consequences

This prejudice can be traced back to the clash he had with Lu Xun (鲁迅, 1881-1936) in 1928. This fight is imbedded in the harsh debate "on the nature of revolutionary literature," which had already started in 1927 and which "in the following two years embroiled virtually all the writers and critics gathered in Shanghai" (Denton and Hockx 2008: 126). The Creation Society, who had the young Ye Lingfeng among his active actors, had a prominent part in the debate. At the very beginning of 1928, Feng Naichao (冯乃超, 1901-1985), a young poet just back from Japan who was close to the Creation

Society, wrote an essay advocating “the intensification of the political movement by the masses” and claimed that “Chinese literature since then had largely vented the misgivings of a displaced petite bourgeoisie [...] In particular he accused Lu Xun of escapism and indulgence in self-pity during a period of social transformation. “Lu Xun the old man” enjoyed nothing better than [...] “contentedly surveying, with intoxicated eyes and from the top floor of a murky wine shop, life outside the window”¹⁰.

In May 1928, Ye Lingfeng had already given up with his studies at the Shanghai Professional Institute of Arts and since 1925 was a young fellow of the Creation Society (创造社小伙计, *Chuangzaoshe xiaohuojì*) and the chief editor of many journals which had strong ties with the Creation Society. The bi-monthly *Gebi* (戈壁, *The Gobi Desert*) was among these periodicals. In the issue n.5, May 1928 Ye Lingfeng published a sort of cartoon drawn by he himself which was transparently “quoting” Feng Naichao’s article. The title of the drawing was “Mr Lu Xun” and Ye Lingfeng provides his sarcastic description¹¹: “Lu Xun, with his two-faced visage, wielding his past successes, waving his “literary weapons” while hiding behind a jar of wine, is resisting to the even-so-coming external aggression.”

¹⁰ Feng Naichao (冯乃超), “Yishu yu shehui shenghuo” (艺术与社会生活, Art and social life), *Wenhua pipan* (文化批, Cultural Critique) 1928/1; quoted in Denton and Hockx (2008: 127).

¹¹“鲁迅, 阴阳脸子老人, 挂着他已往的战绩, 躲在酒缸的后面挥着他“艺术的武器”, 在抵御着纷然而来的外侮。”



Fig. 1. "Mr Lu Xun," The Gobi Desert 1928/5.

The mockery is harsh, but it is perfectly in line with the tone of the debate among the literary societies in those days. On club and the cudgels of the drawing there are not only the titles of some of the best known among the Lu Xun's works, but also some other snarky quips, as for example the sentence "Save the old man!", which openly refers to the last sentence of the widely known *Kuangren riji* (*Diary of a mad man*, 狂人日记, 1918): "Save the children!" The term *weiquan* (威权), "authoritarianism" appears on one of these "weapons" and seems to give vent to a certain degree of intolerance shared by the young writers belonging to the Creation Society against the attitude of

many writers of the former generation, and mainly against Lu Xun – who was the most prominent but not the only one they seemed to be intolerant of. The most “engaged” authors were probably perceived as regularly hazing the new comers. If, indeed, the youngsters did not prove to be very respectful, on the other side is also true that Lu Xun did not show any indulgence towards their juvenile excesses; in spite of his strong criticism against the “feudal morality” and the old values like *xiao* (孝), which clipped the wings of young people, he did not spare his huffy vitriol to their infatuation towards Western “lifestyle” as a whole. Within two letters, both written on August 10th 1928, he was referring to Ye Lingfeng and some others so-called “revolutionary writers,” as people regularly hanging out at Western-style coffee-shops, who could not but necessarily be “young and pretty-looking, with white teeth and vermilion lips (a transparent metaphor for their lack of true revolutionary spirit)” (革命文学家，要年轻貌美，齿白唇红。。。), “gathering together either loudly presenting their viewpoint or quietly plunging into their deep thoughts” (他们有的在那里高谈着他们的主张，有的在那里默默沉思...). He went even further openly attacking those whose fame of being “revolutionary” was relying on the founding or sponsoring of some new journals,¹² on their biblio-mania (Ye Lingfeng himself) or on their habit to invite people for an ice-cream or to present silk garments to those they would like to please. The first letter¹³ is then slipping along the slope of some reprehensible gossip while inducing the idea that their ultimate goal is to pull some dancing-girls or some maidservants (and the courting them by the means of a very “class-oriented” and aristocratic remark!) and the last part of the paper turns even livid when explaining why he does not like frequenting coffee-shops:

First of all, I do not like coffee, I think that's something for Western people, but maybe this is my mistake, a “generation mistake”. I do not like it, still, green tea is much better.” (一，我是不喝咖啡的，我总觉得这是洋大人所喝的东西[但这也许是我的«时代错误»],不喜欢，还是绿茶好)。

The polemics bring Lu Xun so far to make him showing a sort of chauvinist attitude in sharp contrast with his (selective) interest to Western culture and, at the same time, shows us his temper. The second letter is still quite sharp but at least takes into account some theoretical issue, as the theme of the correspondence was dealing with what should be considered revolutionary literature (革命文学,

¹² Probably referring to still neglected poet, writer, editor and publisher Shao Xunmei (邵洵美, 1906 -1968), one among the many Lu Xun clashed with.

¹³ See “Revolutionary coffee-shops” (Geming kafeiguan, “革命咖啡馆”), in Lu (1983: 125-126).

geming wenzue), and the difference between “revolutionary literature” and “literature revolution” (文学革命, *wenzue geming*)¹⁴. Anyway, some room is left to label *The Gobi Desert*, published by the “young revolutionary artist Ye Lingfeng” as a one man’s business (独唱的戈壁, *duchangde Gebi*), that is with no influence in the realm of Shanghai literature.

The young Ye Lingfeng does not keep aside and in November 1929¹⁵ he publishes an unfinished and quite daring short story, *The Autobiography of a depressed* (穷愁的自传, *Qiongchou de zizhuan*). At the beginning of the story, the poor Wei Riqing (魏日青), after having spent a very uncomfortable night laying on the carpet of his even more uncomfortable attic (亭子间, *tingzijian*)¹⁶ where rain is leaking from the roof, gets up early and moves to the balcony to defecate. No toilet paper in such a poor environment and Mr Wei decides to rip up three pages from a second-hand copy of *Shouting* (呐喊, *Nahan*), a quite famous work by Lu Xun he had bought in the previous days...

Lu Xun does of course not appreciate the mockery and on August 12th, 1931, during a talk at the Research Association of Social Sciences¹⁷ gives vent to his rage labelling Ye Lingfeng as a “new bandit painter”(新的流氓画家, *xinde liumang huajia*) - with reference to Ye Lingfeng work as illustrator of many journals and publications of the Creation Society - a “talented bandit” (才子+流氓, *caizi+liumang*), and a “decadent” (颓废, *tuipei*)¹⁸ artist, as Ye Lingfeng proves to be very fond of H.Beardsley whose works he is influenced by. Lu Xun cannot deny that Ye Lingfeng also portrayed some “proletarian” (普罗列塔利亚, *puoluolietaliya*), but their risen fists were bigger than their heads, which does not fit with the principle of depicting the reality as it is! Interestingly enough, the essay takes into consideration and discusses many different and quite “learned” issues, some of which are hot in the literary debate those days, as for example the so-called "mandarin-duck and butterfly literature" (鸳鸯蝴蝶派, *yuanyang hudie pai*) in connection with Hu Shi’s (胡适) play *The Greatest Event in Life* (终身大事, *Zhongshen dashi*), but Lu Xun completely loses his temper when going back to Ye Lingfeng. Talking about Ye Lingfeng understanding of "revolutionary literature" he states: “The well-

¹⁴See “Anecdotes from the world of letters” (“文坛的掌故”, *Wentan de zhanggu*), in Lu (1983: 128-132).

¹⁵ Published for the first time in the journal *Xiandai xiaoshuo* (现代小说, *Modern Narrative*), vol.3, n.2. See Ye (1997: 303).

¹⁶ The penny-less writer living in a poor attic was a topos, in Shanghai those days, both in literature and cinema, but also in real life. Some of them have even be labelled as “attic-writers” (亭子间作家, *tingzijian zuojia*). Usually, these intellectuals were left-oriented, but maybe it is not the case for Wei Riqing, as Lu Xun was regarded with great respect from these “progressive” writers, which is not the case here, or, if it were, it could sound even more offensive!

¹⁷ “A glimpse on art and literature in Shanghai” (“上海文艺之一瞥”, *Shanghai wenyizhi yi pie*) in Lu (1983: 276-294).

¹⁸ This is probably the first time Ye Lingfeng works are connected with the idea of a “decadent” production, but this prejudice worked for a long while.

read Mr Ye Lingfeng, while depicting his revolutionary writer, says that he makes use of my *Nahan* any time he goes to the toilet, in order to rub his ass, no wonder then that he can stay at the back of those so-called democratic literati's ass." (Lu 1983: 285). (文学家叶灵凤先生，他描写革命家，彻底道每次上茅厕时候都用我的呐喊去揩屁股，现在却竟会莫名其妙的跟在所谓民族主义文学家屁股后面了)。 This harsh debate witnesses the violence of the polemics among the intellectuals during the first decades of the 20th century, but in some cases these clashes will cast a dark shadow on a writer's reputation, particularly when he happen to dispute with some *monstre sacré* of the pantheon of literati established by Communist China later on.

This is the case of Ye Lingfeng, in spite the fact Lu Xun and Ye Lingfeng even worked together to introduce the xylography artist Frans Masereel (1889-1972) in China, whose freshly published albums each of them wrote a preface; Lu Xun also took advantage more than once of Ye Lingfeng good social connections which seemed to be relevant in order to overcome some difficulties Lu Xun met in organizing his famous xylography exhibition in 1935.¹⁹

After his moving to Hong Kong in 1938. Ye Lingfeng seems not to like so much to raise this topic and when questioned about it, he does not say too much. This seem to be a constant attitude of the mature Ye Lingfeng and Ye Lingfeng's family, who do not spend too much time to dissipate rumours about Ye Lingfeng integrity²⁰ In spite of his juvenile arrogance, later on, he usually avoided any polemics, but we can understand from some indirect references that he felt sorry about his attitude towards Lu Xun.²¹ The most relevant testament on this topic comes from an article by Qiang Yingliang (强英良) who quotes somebody stating that during the last period of his life in his essay "In between Lu Xun and Ye Lingfeng," from which we know that during the last period of his life, when some friends were again asking about these old staff, he could not but smile, without offering too much explanation, but simply saying that he went to pay visit to Lu Xun's grave and silently expressed his kind feeling to him.²²

¹⁹ See on this topic a short but interesting article by Guo Lingli (Guo 2014).

²⁰ See Liu (1988: 25). Su (柳苏). The translation of the title is quite challenging as it is a play on words based on the fact that the personal name of Ye Lingfeng can be translated as "soul of phoenix"; it is a nom de plume, the official name of the writer being Li Linfeng (李林凤), which echoes the personal name of his first wife, Guo Linfeng (郭林凤).

²¹ See Luo (2003), who quotes an essay by Ye Lingfeng written in the Sixties, on the "people of the third kind" (第三种人, disanzhongren), namely those who were not communist nor anti-communist, dealing with Du Heng (杜衡, 1907-1965), who fled to Taiwan from mainland China in spite having being a Party member and leader, in which there is a hint about this issue.

²² "In between Lu Xun and Ye Lingfeng" (Zai Lu Xun yu Ye Lingfeng zhi jian, 在鲁迅与叶灵凤之间), in Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan (鲁迅研究月刊, Research on Lu Xun - Monthly), June 1992: 53. Strangely enough, the quotation Zhang Yingliang is referring

What for sure harmed Ye Lingfeng much more than this old quarrel was the fact that in the edition of the *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (鲁迅全集), published in China in 1957, it came out that “during the war of resistance against Japan, Ye Lingfeng turned into a “traitor scholar” (汉奸文人, *hanjian wenren*). The shameful calumny was not there anymore in the following edition, coming out in 1981.

4. An “informer” to keep informed about: the unfair destiny of the patriot Ye Lingfeng

Ye Lingfeng left Shanghai at the beginning of 1938, moving to Guangzhou. In March same year he was among those who assumed the office of resuming the publication of 救亡日报 (*Jiawang ribao*, The Salvation Daily) in Guangzhou, together with Xia Yan (夏衍 1900-1995) and other people fled to Guangzhou from Shanghai. The role of Ye Lingfeng in the editorial board of the newspaper is almost totally neglected in the sources from mainland China. *The Salvation Daily* was a newspaper jointly supported by Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party and published in Shanghai from August 24th, 1937, to promote the resistance against Japan. Due to the occupation of Shanghai by the Japanese, the newspaper stopped its publication on November 22, 1937 and moved to Guangzhou, where it was kept in life till October 21, the same year. When Guangzhou also felt under the control of the Japanese army, Ye Lingfeng moved definitively to Hong Kong, where, in spite of the distance from Shanghai, “he already had his fans” (远在香港也有他的仰慕者, “*yuan zai Xianggang ye you tade yangmuzhe*”)²³.

As Fan Sinpin points out “as British authorities were neutral with the conflict, [in 1937] Hong Kong was not affected by the war and was a good resort for those running away from upheaval.” Ye Lingfeng had already left Shanghai at the beginning of 1938 and in March same year he assumed his office in Hong Kong. Even if in this paper I will not go into details of his *hou ban sheng* (后半生), “the

to (footnote n.17) is missing at the end of the text, whose notes leap from n.16 to n.18. I was not yet able to detach the source.

²³ I am grateful to prof. Fan Sinpiu (樊善标, Hong Kong transcription of the name, used by the author himself), from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, from whom I benefitted the privilege of reading the article I am quoting hereby, which prof. Fan has not yet published. Most of the information on Ye Lingfeng early staying in Hong Kong come from his article: “Art, Literature and the War of Resistance. A side survey of Ye Lingfeng as editor-in-chief of «The Foundation Daily - The wood of worlds [insert] »” (Wenyi yu kangzhan - Ye Lingfeng zhubian Xianggang «Libao- Yanlin» cemiao guancha, 文艺与抗战-叶灵凤主编香港«立报-言林»的侧面观察).

second part of his life” – to quote a very inspiring article by Zong Lan (宗兰),²⁴ I cannot avoid scrutinizing the first years of Ye Lingfeng staying in Hong Kong, and particularly the period after Japanese occupation of the city in 1941, as the shameful accusation to have been a traitor is rooted in these years and probably relies on some events which were unveiled by the controversial but very important article Liu Su wrote in 1988. Based on a short autobiographical piece by the Hong Kong "finance king" Hu Hanhui (胡汉辉),²⁵ Liu Su unveiled an episode Ye Lingfeng himself did never talk about. After having moved to Hong Kong, Ye Lingfeng worked for the *Sing Tao Daily* (星岛日报) from March 1939 up to his retirement. He was introduced to the Sing Dao media group by Dai Wangshu (戴望舒), his friend and companion, who had moved to Hong Kong some time in advance. After some time he took over the responsibility of the newspaper supplement *Constellation* (Xingzuo/星座) from Dai's hands and *Constellation* became somehow his "one man's business, as he ran it all his life long and it disappeared after Ye Lingfeng retirement (Luo 1986: 125). During the so-called "three-years-and-eight-months" period of Japanese occupation the newspaper was changed the name in *Xiangjiang ribao* (香江日报), *The Fragrant River Daily*, and Ye Lingfeng continued working there while also working in the *Datong gongsi* (大同公司), Datong Company, a publishing company directly ran by the Japanese Ministry of Culture. For this reason, he was got in touch by the Guomindang (国民党), and asked to do some clandestine work behind the enemy's line, collecting information on Japanese cultural activities and printed material spread in sized Hong Kong, but also on the Hong Kong cultural life itself. Standing on Hu Hanhui memories, Ye Lingfeng did this job for around one year, and Hu himself was asked to offer him some support (配合叶灵凤, *peihe Ye Lingfeng*). Liu Su was rather close to Ye's family and his article bear a quite devoted tone, to mention the Guomindang issues seems even to cause him some discomfort, as if openly linking Ye Lingfeng to the Nationalist Party could still bring some harm to his memory and spoil once again his image in mainland China, whose Hong Kong was becoming closer and closer. For this reason, he probably tries to minimize the event, naively questioning the verb *peihe*, which in his opinion suggests a very minor and episodic role of Ye Lingfeng.

²⁴ This name standing for Luo Fu (罗孚). The article has been published on 人物 (Personage), n.1, 1986; the complete title reads: "The second part of Ye Lingfeng's life" (叶灵凤后半生, *Ye Lingfeng hou bansheng*).

²⁵ Hu Hanhui (1922-1985), the so-called "king of banking and finance in Hong Kong". A Li (阿离). 2016. (真金不镀, 情义常存 "Real gold cannot be overlaid, the ties of friendship cannot be cut. Remembering the King of Finance Hu Hanhui" (Zhenjin bu du, qingyi chang cun. Yi Xianggang jinwang Hu Hanhui, 真金不镀, 情义常存. 忆香港金王胡汉辉), in Hu Hanhui (胡汉辉), *Xianggang huangjin shichang* (香港黄金市场, *The Gold Market in Hong Kong*), Hong Kong, Sanlian shudian: 32-33. I am deeply grateful to prof. Xiao Si (小思) who provided me with this reference.

But an article published in the monthly journal *Nanbeiji* (南北极, South and Nord poles) two years later provided some files from Japanese archives which definitely witness that Ye Lingfeng did this job and was even paid 50 *yuan* pro month for it (Zhu 1990). The Japanese discovered the trick and Ye Lingfeng was imprisoned (1942).²⁶ It is quite interesting and offers some hints to Ye Lingfeng personality the fact that, after the end of the war, Ye Lingfeng never mentioned to have been imprisoned for the sake's of his love for motherland and patriotic feelings, not even when China labelled him as a traitor.²⁷ And this is even more remarkable as his imprisonment happened only a few months later than Dai Wangshu was caught in prison, but everybody knew about the latter, no one knew about the former. The consciousness that Ye Lingfeng was a patriot was anyway well spread. Many knew, for example, just to quote a minor issue, that he was the one who paid a visit to the lonely grave of the young female writer Xiao Hong (萧红, 1911-1942), bringing her a bunch of tea from Hongshan (Zong Lan ??: 126), but what is, of course, more important is that – together with many others and as far as it was allowed by the times – he kept constant relationships with many prominent intellectuals from continental China, also after the foundation of PRC. But all the pieces of evidence we can rely on, show that Ye Lingfeng and Ye Lingfeng's family did not like to go back to those days' memories. The only information provided By Liu Su in his article, which the family reacted to denying it deals with an invitation Ye Lingfeng had possibly received from the Japanese Government to go to Tokyo for attending a conference on cultural issues. The family stated clearly that Ye Lingfeng never went to Tokyo and the press did an indirect account of this retraction by an article written a few months later in the supplement of *Wenyi bao* (文艺报, The Journal of Letters and Art; Jiang 1988: 8).

²⁶ I do not have (yet) the precise date, but it is for sure in 1942, as this happened a few months later than Dai Wangshu's imprisonment, which took place at the end of 1941.

²⁷ As Liu Su states: "Ye Lingfeng was not a fighter for the sake of his ideals, he was simply a good fellow" ("...他不是志士，只是有良心的人"; Liu 1988: 25). This psychological feature does by no means prevent him having his personality, ideas and consequent behavior, but he probably did not see any heroism in been imprisoned, but rather considering this experience as an attack to his dignity as a human being. I make this remark based on a rather unknown fact which occurred to him in August 1926, when he was based in Shanghai and working for the Creation Society. Due to the accusation of being a supporter of the Northern Expedition (北伐战争, 1926-1927), he was arrested with some other members of the literary society and put in jail. All the group was released within a few days, but Ye Lingfeng was somehow shocked by this experience: "Even if I did not really suffer...I was in a dark room together with some 60-70 people whom I did not know, most of whom were naked and whose skin was stinky due to the lacking of a proper shower since a few days: well, I really could not bear all this!... Then those who really suffered hardships before I came to my mind and I felt ashamed. Oh, friends, you who by mouth are rising the signboard of revolution, I'd like you to try it!" (see Li Guangyu 2003: 40-41).

What we can take for granted now is that there was nothing infamous in Ye Lingfeng's behaviour and that the times were quite hard and full of contradictions. In April 1941, while asking him to collaborate, the Guomindang Censorship was signalling *The Red Angel* (红天使, Hong tianshi), a short story Ye Lingfeng had written in 1930, in its lists of proscription.²⁸ The dangerousness of the work relied on the fact that, in the opinion of the zealous officer who compiled the list, it was "strengthening the class consciousness and advocating the class struggle" (强调阶级意识, 鼓吹阶级斗争). I guess he never read the story, whose main male character is Ding Jianhe (丁健鹤), a not convincing "revolutionary chap," is involved in a four-sided love affair by his young and neurotic sister-in-law. The story ends up into a tragedy, as the girl commits suicide and, even if the plot deals very marginally with revolution, Ye Lingfeng takes the chance to express his distance from possible revolution's spell.²⁹ In this respect, the most interesting issue deals with his usage of the image of the sun in the novel, which seems both ironic and vaguely hopeless as we know the story turns into a tragedy. Ye Lingfeng had an educational background in the field of arts, and here he proves to be totally aware of rising sun's metaphoric meaning for Marxist revolutionaries: the just married couple stands in front of the rising sun, on their boat-trip to Shanghai, and the narrator's voice gives vent to their feeling "Long live to the Red Angel [i.e. the sun]" he screams at the end, but we know that his story does not have a happy end:

At then, on the surface of the sea, in that daybreak, in front of that sun pouring out from the East, as a Red Angel, everybody felt as the brightness of their future and the emblem of their happiness were standing under the light of the rising sun, anyone was swearing that if only the sun were there they could coexist that way forever, one by one, under its light. Long live to the Red Angel!

(于是这一天在这黎明中的海面上, 对了这从东天涌出的太阳, 这红的天使, 个人觉得这正是他们前途光明和幸福的象征立在朝阳的光明下, 各人都暗誓着这要太阳有一天存在, 他们都要永远这样的并立在他的光明中. "红的天使万岁" (Ye 1997: 418).

²⁸ See Wu (2013: 270). I am deeply grateful to prof. Xiao Si (小思), from Kong Kong, who gave me this information together with a big bunch of information and suggestions and, together with Ye Lingfeng daughters, made me feel the wonderful atmosphere within the intellectual circles of "Chinese immigrants" and their mates in Hong Kong.

²⁹ When interfering with the story, the narrator happens to share his ideas on the "ideals" of Ding Jianhe and really seems to keep quite some distance: "Making the classes disappear and struggling for the emancipation from any tyranny, questing for the happiness of the masses and the happiness of the entire world: an extremely realistic reformer maybe is, at the same time, an extremely ridiculous dreamer" (阶级的铲除, 束缚的解放高压下的挣扎, 群众的幸福, 幸福的世界, 一个极端的现实的改革者, 同时也几乎是一个可笑梦想者, see Ye (1997: 404).

It can be taken for granted that the shabby official from Guomindang did not know the story, but the book written by a Guomindang “informer” was put on the blacklist! Something likewise contradictory happened when the label of “traitor” was buckled on him: *The Complete Works of Lu Xun* in which this insulting epithet appeared, was published in 1957, nevertheless in 1959 he was anyway invited to participate the ceremonies for the 10th anniversary from the foundation of PRC and he was again officially invited in 1965, at the eve of the Cultural Revolution³⁰. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, when the new edition of *The complete Works of Lu Xun* appeared, the reference to Ye Lingfeng as a traitor had completely disappeared but the Author in those days had already passed away. We only can collect the witnesses which still prove his lifelong attachment for his country, among which the bequest of a prominent part of his library to the Sun Zhongshan library in Canton³¹ and we cannot but feel sorry that a long-lasting prejudice against this intellectual prevented also the Chinese scholars to take into consideration some suggestions coming from his early literary production (even regardless of its artistic value) on a possible way to make traditional literary heritage and modern literature keep a vivid and fruitful dialogue.

5. “Transplanting the past into the present:” the neglected lesson of a young writer

The frequency Ye Lingfeng refers to “classical literature” in his short stories and novels is quite relevant and I think it cannot be neglected, particularly as we are taking into consideration a period when the relationship with the past literature was a core point for the Chinese intellectuals. Ye Lingfeng did not write theoretical essays on the topic during his stay in Shanghai, even if the so-called *dazhong xiaoshuo* (大众小说, “novel for the masses”) was somehow a topic on his agenda.³²

Here I will take into consideration some among the not rare references to the classical heritage which can be tracked down in his production. As many other authors of the so-called 海派 (*Haipai*, Shanghai-school writers) Ye Lingfeng often resorted to quoting at least names and titles from Western – European and American – or Japanese authors to add some exotic *allure* to his narration.

³⁰ Among the others, Liu (X1988: 26).

³¹ One of Ye Lingfeng’s daughters, Ye Zhongmei (叶忠梅), told extensively to me about this issue. Ye Lingfeng’s craze for books was well known within the intellectuals in Hong Kong and became also an issue in some academic articles. Zhongmei told me that the amount of money his father spent for buying books was one of the very few reasons for quarrelling between his father and his mother.

³² See the introduction to his novel 时代姑娘 *Modern Girl* (时代姑娘, *Shidai guniang*) the first of two novels by Ye Lingfeng to be serialized in the newspaper *New Times* (时事新报, *Shishi xin bao*), where his understanding of 大众小说 actually coincides with a “market-oriented” literature, whose plot and narrative scheme seems to be influenced by the readers’ reaction and seems somehow to be the product of an interaction with the readership (Ye 1977: 472-473)

The role of these “quotations” is very limited and often seems to be a way of showing off some familiarity with Western/alien culture to impress the reader. This is not the case for the use of Chinese traditional literature in Ye Lingfeng, which often brings along a strong inter-textual function.

Let’s take into consideration one of the earliest works of Ye Lingfeng, *Sand washed by the waves* (浪淘沙, *Lang tao sha*). It is the unhappy love story between two cousins, to which the relevant difference in social status is preventing any happy end. The reciprocal attraction between the two youngers relies on the fact that they praise to be versed both in Chinese and Western culture and to melt and adapt to each other new and old. (他们自誉是学贯中西, 融新恰 (qia) 旧...) (Ye 1997: 7).

In spite of this “correspondence in loving senses,” the lack of self-confidence of the male character Xi Qiong also relies on a traditional *topos*: “The fame coming from *belles lettres* is written on water” (文艺上的名誉是写在水面)(Ye 1997: 8). This claim is conferred supplementary strength by many elements, which all are rooted in the traditional literature:

The title, which refers to a poem by Li Yu (937-978), one verse of which also works as the subtitle of the short story; at the same time it also recalls an image used by many poets from Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 (772- 842) to Bai Juyi, Su Shi etc.

The “subtitle,” which is a verse by the famous emperor-poet Li Yu (937-978); “The water runs off, the flowers fall, also spring comes to an end: everything, in the sky and among man” (流水落花春去也天上人间?) (Ye 1997: 5).

And, above all, the choice of the author both of lovers are reading and do love: Huang Zhongze. 黄仲则 (1749- 1783) a Qing poet, known to be poor but honest, lifelong frustrated and penniless. Does he completely mirror the male character Xi Qiong 西琼? (琼 being a perfect homophone of 穷).

It is interesting to note that Ye Lingfeng is consciously using Western (or not- Chinese) literary references with different aims.

Western/alien literature is to please his readership letting it know that his acquaintance with these works of literature can be shared with them, as they are part of a more "global", modern world. But he is perfectly aware that the non-Chinese authors do not echo in the mind of his readers and do not cause any phenomenon of empathy: they only add some “Shanghai colour” (海派克勒, *haipai kele*), to use a term fashionable in those days.

On the contrary, he makes wide use of references to the Chinese traditional literature to provide in short the idea he wants to convey. This happens, for example, while describing the concerns of the mother of the female character, Shu Hua, who dislikes the perspective having her daughter married with a nice but penniless “intellectual,” as she made a lot of sacrifices and now she risks not to get

anything in return (她并不是对他们起了怜惜，她是叹息自己养蓄女儿的一番苦心的结果³³). To describe her awareness of the “dangerous situation” Ye Lingfeng simply informs his reader that “She is perfectly aware that they are not indifferent to each other anymore and that they have already started to play their own *Hongloumen* story” (“她知道他们已不是无心出此，已是在演着红楼梦中的故事...”).³⁴

The case of the short story 落雁 *Luo Yan* (1929) is even more interesting. *Luo Yan* is the personal name of the female character of the story.³⁵ Keeping the personal name as the title of the short story also in its translation is, of course, correct but completely fails in conveying what it conveys in Chinese. As a temporary solution I would probably choose *Mr. Bluebeard daughter* even if this choice fits with Ye Lingfeng story, but, as we will see, it is misleading if put into connection with the original “*Luo Yan*”’s story, as *Luo Yan* is a historical female personage who was leaving the first century B. C.

Ye Lingfeng’s story reminds me the much more articulated and fascinating *Traumnovelle* (“Dream Story”/ “Dream Novel”) by Arthur Schnitzler, which Ye Lingfeng could know, as its first edition came out in 1926, having been originally written in 1925. *Luo Yan* is an interesting example of exploring the world in between dream and reality and moving far to the line which divides the unspeakable drives from the “acceptable” sexual impulses. Quite interestingly, the novel brings an element of latent homosexuality, which is a realm Ye Lingfeng explores also in other works. The plot is simple: a young and fascinating lady arrives at the cinema where Mr Feng Ruwei (冯弱苇), a young poet of the same reputation has also planned to watch a movie. Strangely enough in the “modern Shanghai” she arrives riding in a white horses drawn carriage (which is a hint which should act as a warning for the reader: no white horses along Shanghai’s streets in those days: haven’t we be plunged into a fair-tale?) The two happen to meet and literature is once more the match-maker between them. They even have the chance to carefully evaluate the Chinese translation of *La Dame aux camélias* (*Chahua nü* 茶花女) by Leng Hongsheng³⁶

I have heard that when Lin Shu was translating “The Dame of Camellias” he was bereaved of his wife and that, for this reason, his language is unusually and sadly touching. The pity is that the text has been oversimplified. A. Dumas work is much more

³³ *Sand washed by the waves* (浪淘沙, *Lang tao sha*), in Ye Lingfeng (1997: 16).

³⁴ *Sand washed by the waves* (浪淘沙, *Lang tao sha*), in Ye Lingfeng (1997: 14-15).

³⁵ I cannot but underline that the choice of personal names in Ye Lingfeng, including his own pen name, deserves some attention as it often mirrors some psychological features of his characters [or some auto-biographic issues].

³⁶ 冷红生 (1852-1824), better known as Lin Shu (林纾).

brilliant”(听说冷红生译《茶花女》的时候，正在悼亡期内，所以文笔异常哀艳，只可惜太简略了。小仲马的原文精彩更多”) (Ye 1997: 26).

Feng Ruowei (whose name sounds as “week/flexible reed”) is attracted by the strange young lady, whose spell he cannot resist so that he accepts her invitation to follow her to her father’s home. The father is a sophisticated intellectual coming from the North of the country who is used to seduce or to force the young male victims her daughter provides him. Mr Ruowei is at the end rescued by Luo Yan herself, who drives him out of the house, where he hires a car which tries to pay with some “money of the dead”. The charm of Luo Yan was almost costing him his life and a watchful Chinese reader could guess it from the very title of the story. Luo Yan is the nickname of Wang Zhaojun (王昭君) one of the Four Beauties of ancient China, and she was the “pearl in the palm” of her old father. Around 30 B.C. she was sent by Emperor Yuan to marry the Xiongnu Chanyu Huhanye (呼韓邪) to establish friendly relations with the Han Dynasty through marriage. In the most prevalent version of the "Four Beauties" legend, it is said that Wang Zhaojun left her hometown on horseback on a bright autumn morning and began a journey northward. Along the way, the horse neighed, making Zhaojun extremely sad and unable to control her emotions. As she sat on the saddle, she began to play sorrowful melodies on a stringed instrument. A flock of geese flying southward heard the music, saw the beautiful young woman riding the horse, immediately forgot to flap their wings, and fell to the ground. From then on, Zhaojun acquired the nickname “the one who fells geese” or “drops birds.” It seems that there are about 700 poems and songs and dozens of stories and folktales about Wang Zhaojun from more than 500 famous writers. What is interesting in Ye Lingfeng story is that the power of her charm is used to “drop a young man”, potentially causing him some harm. His heroine is rather closer to the traditional “fox”, in the less dangerous version of the one who finally rescues her lover from the disaster. Or, if we want to read the story the other way around, the true “fox” is here embodied by Luo Yan’s father, who at the first step is enchanting the young man by the means of his culture. Luo Yan is bestowed the new and much progressive role of a woman who saves a man from another man’s fascination.

Ye Lingfeng has a very interesting way of dealing with classic tradition and I think that if more dialogue were possible between the intellectuals who happened to settle down in Hong Kong³⁷ during the Thirties and Forties, not only the narrative about the history of Chinese Literature would be different, but the literary production itself could benefit from a broader developing path.

³⁷ Some scholars point out that maybe the decision to settle down in Hong Kong was not planned by Ye Lingfeng but, as it happened for many other intellectuals, it was a “consequence of history”. See on this topic Lü (1985: 128).

The very ungenerous prejudice, fed by continental China, which – at least up to the end of the Seventies – was describing Hong Kong as a “cultural desert” (文化沙漠, *wenhua shamo*), was more or less consciously working also among the majority of the Western scholars. We have made not enough research work in order to dig out and to unveil the role of the “immigrate intellectuals”, who moved to Hong Kong from mainland China and who were actively working in preserving, transmitting and critically evaluating the classical literary tradition, linking it with the culture and the literature of modern and contemporary China. Ye Lingfeng story works as a quite meaningful example.

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